Hooklight: The First Embers

The inspirations for my 12-part Doctor Who.

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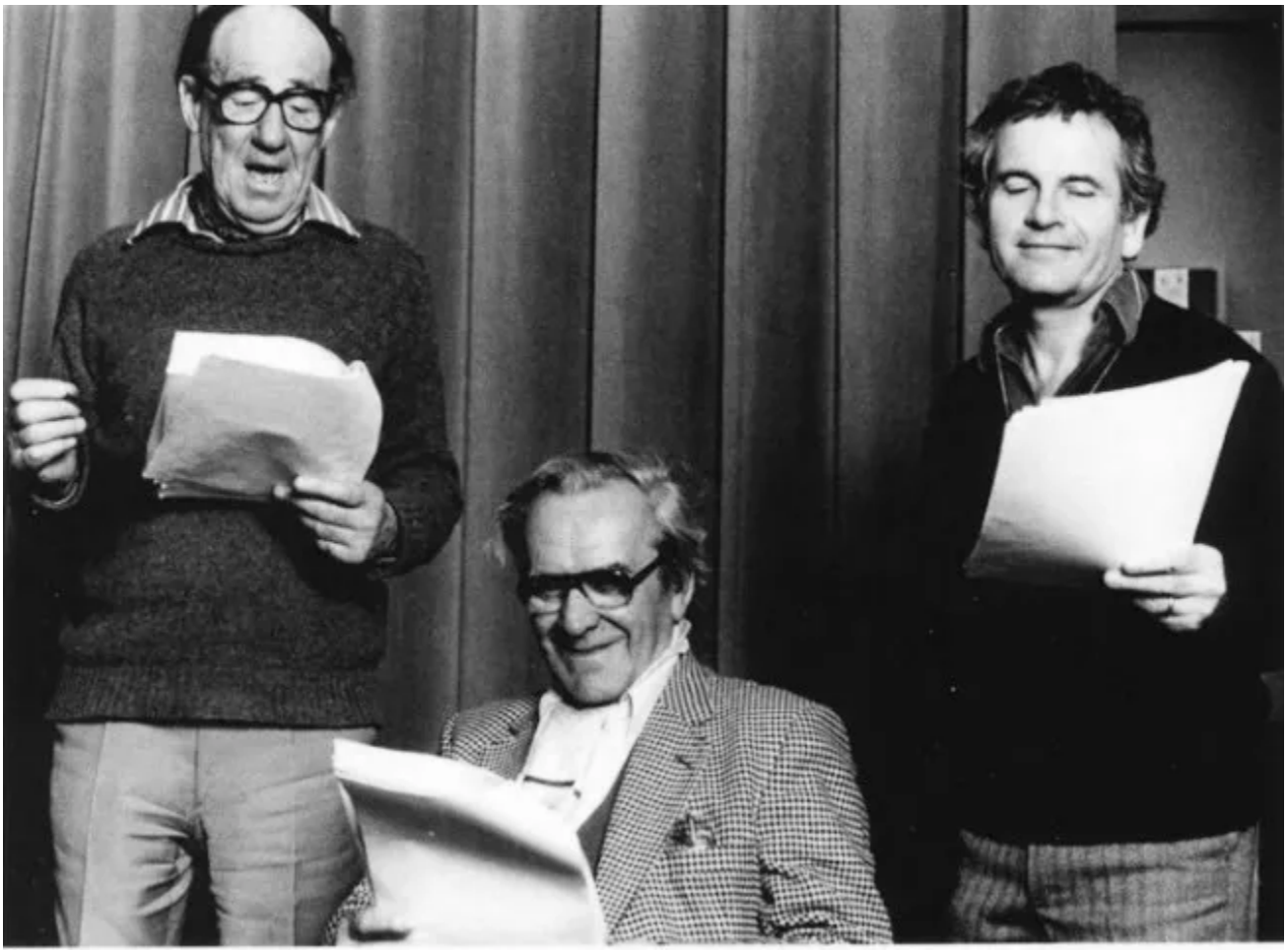
There is a light that must never be lit...



Three legends (Michael Hordern, John Le Mesurier, Ian Holm) pose with their scripts.

March 1981 saw the start of BBC Radio 4's THE LORD OF THE RINGS, a mammoth audio adventure that quickly caught the attention of listeners. Fishing around for another long-running serial to capitalise on this show's success, the radio commissioner at the time had a striking idea. Perhaps they should approach one of their own television dramas about a radio drama spin-off? John Nathan Turner, riding high on the success of DOCTOR WHO'S Season 19, saw an opportunity - and by the

summer of 1982, HOOKLIGHT was born.

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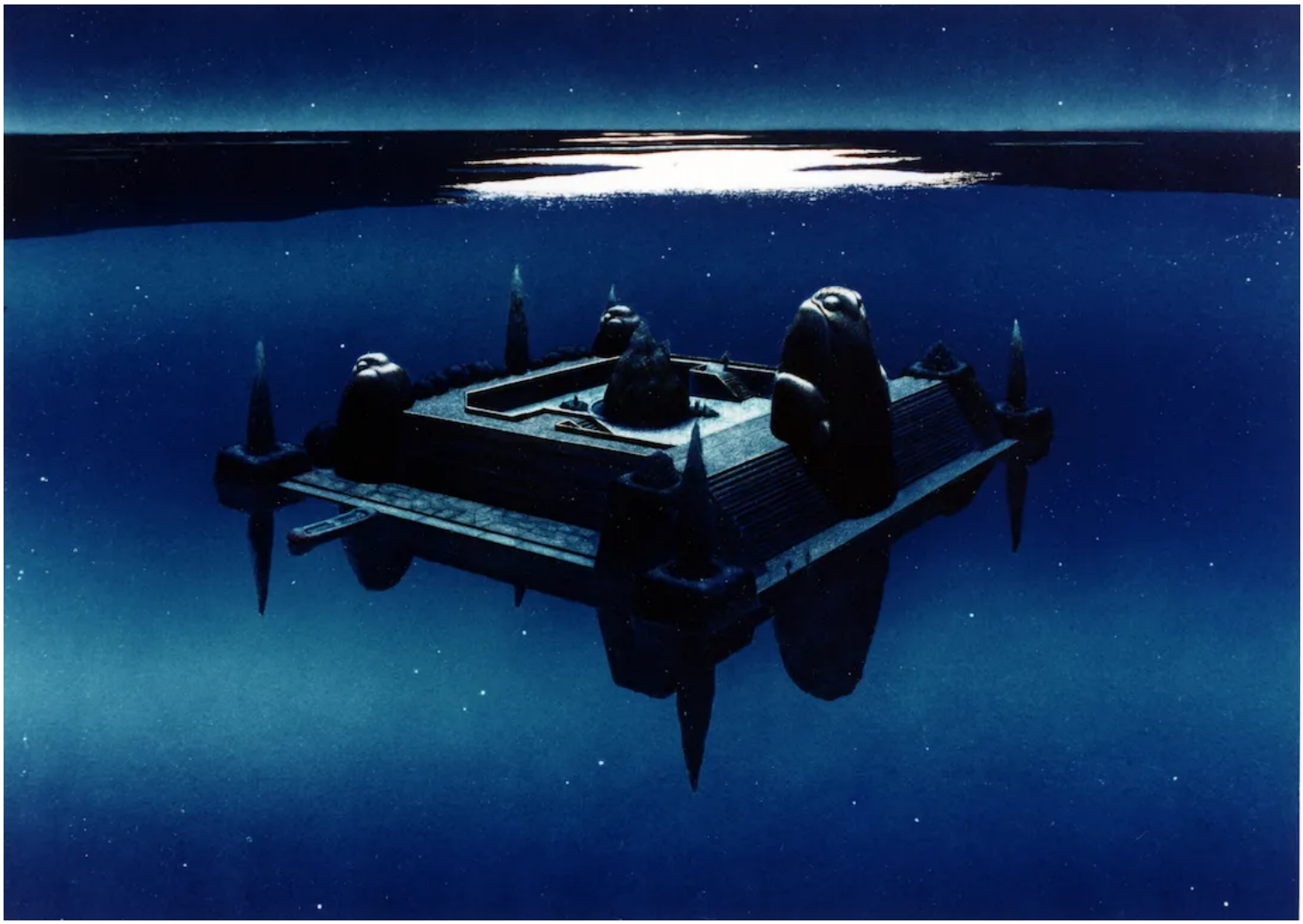
This… did not happen. But this is the mindset I put myself in when I was asked to pitch a 12-episode story for Big Finish's Fifth Doctor Adventures. David Richardson wanted a whole new environment and original characters to explore, so I thought about all the fantastical worlds that were swirling around in the early 80s.

I mention above the Tolkien adaptation for Radio 4, but we also had Asimov finally extending his FOUNDATION series (with 1982's FOUNDATION AND EDGE); the art/influence of Mœbius hitting the big screen with 1982's LES MAÎTRES DU TEMPS; the STAR WARS gap between 1980's THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK and RETURN OF THE JEDI in 1983 - being filled with stories told in comics and with toys and fan fiction; and David Lynch's bonkers DUNE (okay, a little later with 1984, but it was probably in the planning stage, right?).



A moody still from LES MAÎTRES DU TEMPS. I love the film's artwork.

I have dwelt before on the synthesis of recreating an era authentically and doing entirely new things with it. I am not from the 1980s, it's the time I never had, so I'm always going to be approaching this period as an outsider and taking some creative leaps. However, I was keen to sit with some timely influences and think what DOCTOR WHO might do with a six-hour miniseries and an impossible budget. And it's interesting how many of these properties - FOUNDATION, DUNE, STAR WARS - are finding new life in today's era, much as we try to do with the Who audios. I mean look, ultimately these things are always just a good excuse to sit around and read/hear/watch some great stuff for 'research'. Brewing and stewing is a vital step for ~~making a good cup of tea~~ writing.

I really liked the idea of putting the Fifth Doctor in high sci-fi/fantasy. Maybe I read the reprint of THE TIDES OF TIME (the original DWM comics featuring Five) at an impressionable age, but he seems at home bearing witness to impossible wonders and dramas on a vast canvas. It's a pity he's so tall and lithe, because he is at heart a cricket-playing hobbit.

HOOKLIGHT is set in the realm of Morning. As the Doctor explains to his friends…

"When the stars first formed and the planets appeared, it is said that this corner of reality was the dawn of civilisation."

There's no Earth, no Skaro, no Gallifrey, no anything you'll recognise. Things here are older, stranger, more mythic. And then of course there's the hooklight itself - once known as the Ad-Ual, or 'the Fool's Glow'…

But wait wait wait, I don't want to give too much away! We're still a while away from reaching these ancient shores. The first volume doesn't come out until April 2025. If anyone's interested, I may write some more primers in the lead-up to its release - the worlds, the characters, the quest - just let me know!

But I hope for now you'll do me the honour of pre-ordering this grand adventure. Twelve whole episodes require a lot of plot, a lot of characters, a lot of drama - and I

was determined to give it my absolute all. And truth be told, I'll likely never get the chance to write anything this epic again. So grab your lamp of hooklight - and know that an amazing journey for you lies ahead...

PS I *teased* the word 'HOOKLIGHT' in previous substacks. An intergalactic brownie to those who can find it. I put in clues for future stories all the time and nobody gets them!! There's a nod to a future title buried in this missive too :)

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"I am not from the 1980s, it’s the time I never had"

Was this, by any chance, a hint towards your newest 8DA? You're a clever man, Mr. Foley

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So excited!

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